

Gilbert Carman Honored with SWOSU President's Award of Merit

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Gilbert Carman, a Hydro native and 1967 graduate of Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford, was recently honored by the university with the President's Award of Merit for his role in the history of human space flight.

Carman, who now lives in Hydro, was presented the award by SWOSU President Randy Beutler at Hydro Free Fair activities on August 22. Former Space Shuttle Program Development Manager Lee Norbraten of Houston also assisted in the presentation to Carman.

The 1963 Hydro High School graduate grew up on a farm just north of Hydro. He had his share of chores but also showed an early interest in science and electronics. Before the farm had electricity, Carman was fascinated by battery-operated short wave radios and taught himself Morse code at the age of 11.

While in high school, Carman competed in an annual science competition and he proceeded to win first place honors in biology, chemistry and physics. Seeing unlimited opportunity in science, it became increasingly obvious that Carman was not destined to become a third generation farmer.

He enrolled at SWOSU, where he majored in physics. As he approached graduation, he had his sights set on a career at NASA and was pleased to accept an offer to join the team of mission planners in June of 1967.

He was immediately trained in the specialized field of celestial mechanics—how spacecraft travel in orbit. He quickly became an expert in the maneuvers that would get the Lunar Module to the surface of the moon and back. The first such mission was Apollo 10, the dress rehearsal for the lunar landing in May 1969 when the Lunar Module came within nine miles of the surface. That mission was commanded by another local hero, Thomas P. Stafford.

As the Space Shuttle program came into being in the late 1970s, Carman transitioned to work on the entry and landing of the Space Shuttle Orbiter. While not as exotic as a lunar landing, it was mathematically far more complex. He became the acknowledged expert in Space Shuttle entry guidance and helped train many of the flight controllers who were responsible for the safe entry and landing of the Orbiter.

Carman also had an impact on the recent Mars Science Laboratory (MSL), also known as Curiosity, that made a pinpoint landing at Gale Crater on the surface of Mars in August, 2012. Planners from the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, who were responsible for the mission, engaged some of the Johnson Space Center entry guidance experts and Carman was a key player in that development.

The SWOSU Presidential Award of Merit is an honor bestowed upon an individual who has shown outstanding achievement on the state, national or international level in the arts, sciences, business, industry, professions, sports, social service or public service. The distinct honor represents recognition of great achievement that a member of the SWOSU family has attained.